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CAN WE PROTECT THE WEAKEST SECTORS OF OUR SOCIETIES?

TRANSCRIPTION OF A PUBLIC LECTURE BY

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How democracy can protect the most vulnerable sectors of society is a persistent challenge faced by modern democracies that have adopted the principle of representative democracy. In this system, citizens do not participate directly in the democratic process but instead elect representatives to safeguard their interests. Since its establishment in the 17th century in England with the bill of rights of 1689, this form of representative democracy has revealed numerous shortcomings. A significant weakness of this system is the potential for the majority to dominate and

control the democratic process outcomes without considering the needs and interests of the most vulnerable sectors of society or minorities, whether ethnic, religious, or otherwise. It is important to remember that Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany through democratic elections not a military coup. Another notable example is the 2024 election in the United Kingdom, where the ruling party formed a government and secured an absolute majority in the House of Commons with only 33% of the electorate's support. A similar situation occurred with the election of Donald Trump as president in 2016 in the United states, despite not winning the popular vote.

An important aspect of the modern representative democracy and its electoral systems is that the weakest and marginalised sectors of society are often the least participating in the electoral process, resulting in their under-representation even in an ideal electoral system. Addressing how to protect these vulnerable and marginalised sectors, including all minorities, is crucial for building a true and meaningful democracy.

The fundamental concept of democracy, as established in Athens, was based on direct participatory democracy, where everyone was required to participate in the democratic process. Public office was assigned to individuals through a random selection process

called sortition; ensuring that everyone contributed to the democratic process. Public office was primarily reserved for proposing legislations, which were then discussed and debated openly in the public squares of Athens before being directly approved or rejected by the Athenians themselves.

As societies have grown in size, this innovative Athenian form of collective rule, despite its own weaknesses, such as the exclusion of women and slaves, has become difficult to replicate in our modern, larger and sophisticated societies. Some argue for improving electoral systems by adopting the principle of proportional representation, which may partially address the issue but does not

resolve the fundamental problem of under-representation of the weakest and most marginalised sectors of the society in any electoral process. Another potential solution involves enshrining the basic rights of the most vulnerable sectors in the constitutions of our modern nation-states. However, this approach has its weaknesses, as constitutions or their interpretations can be manipulated by the dominant sectors in society, who, through their wealth and power, can influence the electoral system and push their representatives to the forefront, ultimately allowing them to reformulate, suspend, or even disregard the constitution. Numerous examples illustrate this tragic fate of constitutions all around the globe.

A realistic and feasible preliminary solution in our modern times may involve adopting the basic universal humanitarian principles, as established by the United Nations and its specialised agencies, into the constitutions and local laws of every nation-state to safeguard women, children, the impoverished, the disabled, the unemployed, the marginalised individuals, and minorities within society. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights serves as an exemplary guiding principle to achieve this objective. These international humanitarian laws and principles have been drafted by professional technocrats who are relatively unbiased by the virtue of their backgrounds as experts in their field. Although they draft these laws, the process of turning

them into international treaties often encounters challenges due to the complexities of relationships within the United Nations, particularly among nations seeking greater influence and protection of their interests. Nevertheless, any draft that evolves into international humanitarian declamation, treaty or a law represents a significant initial step towards protecting the basic rights of the most vulnerable sectors of any given society, which can be further enhanced by building on it through local and domestic legislations in this society per se.

It is important to acknowledge the efforts of numerous professional technocrats who have worked diligently behind the scenes to establish

the foundations of civility at the global stage, aimed at preventing conflicts akin to the two world wars. This was a fundamental reason for the creation of the United Nations. These technocrats have been instrumental in drafting numerous international declarations and treaties, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development. These international declarations, approved by the United Nations General Assembly, reflect the collective will of the majority of states in the post-World War II era, when global interconnectedness and the effects of globalisation blurred traditional borders, and transformed the world into a closely-knit community.

The aspiration to integrate the international humanitarian principles, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, into local and domestic laws and national constitutions may seem ambitious. However, we are confronted with numerous existential challenges, including the ubiquitous calamities of climate collapse, the threat of nuclear Armageddons intentionally or accidentally, and the rise of populism at the expense of receding democracy worldwide. These issues are exacerbated by the insidious manipulative powers of artificial intelligence along with its deep fake technologies, in addition to the wicked use of the cyber

psychographic tools with their surgical precision to rewire human minds with the help of the nasty algorithms of maximising engagement on the social media platforms. We should not forget that all of these expansive and expensive manipulative technologies and platforms are owned by an ultra-rich and deeply connected oligarchic class who operate what they own to server their narrow interests with complete disregard for the wellbeing of those who are affected by their practices. In this context, societies cannot afford the luxury of trial-and-error experiments to develop an ideal system for protecting the livelihood of their weakest and most vulnerable segments. The current global situation reveals how refugees, undocumented migrants, the homeless,

individuals with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, the ill, the infirm, and the very poor are often sacrificed in the arena of political games and disregarded in the theatrical shows of contemporary identity politics. This is usually done by either attributing their suffering to their own actions or by criminalising and demonising them as invaders or parasites.

It seems imperative to act promptly and thoughtfully to address the issue of protecting the most vulnerable segments of our societies while striving to preserve our faltering democracies. Failing to do so nullify our claim to be civilised human beings. We have to work diligently to transform the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights and its counterparts into universal practices and unwavering conventional guidelines for our societal interactions across every part of our common home in planet Earth.

Publisher's Note:

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